



STATE OF WASHINGTON

January 2006

Dear Members of the Early Learning Community:

The Office of the Governor and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction have a strong tradition of supporting early learning in Washington State. Our state recognizes that children who have a creative, stimulating, and nurturing environment are more likely to enter school eager to learn and better prepared to excel in the classroom. This affects not only their success in school and in life but also, ultimately, our state's ability to compete in the 21st century.

In October 2004, Governor Gary Locke and Superintendent of Public Instruction Terry Bergeson unveiled draft *Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks*. These guidelines, the first of their kind in Washington State, were designed to help parents, teachers, child care providers, and other caring adults identify various stages of a child's development from birth to six years, and the skills and knowledge that children should have by the time they enter Kindergarten. After receiving input from persons across the state, the draft Benchmarks were revised and published in June 2005. We thank the Benchmarks development team for its outstanding work and commitment to Washington's children and families. We are delighted to renew our firm commitment to early childhood education and to take the Benchmarks development to the next phase.

Currently, a comprehensive, broad-based, multidisciplinary review of every aspect of Washington's educational system – including early learning, K-12, and higher education – is underway. The effort is called Washington Learns and one of its three advisory committees, the Early Learning Council, was formed specifically to look at how to move forward in the area of early learning.

To progress to the next phase, we are appointing a new leadership team and charging them with an important responsibility: to develop recommendations to the Washington Learns Steering Committee (on which I serve as chair and Superintendent Bergeson serves as K-12 chair) on how best to enhance and redesign the Benchmarks to ensure their appropriateness for all children in our state.

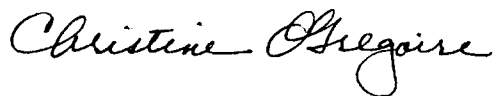
The new team will include members of the original development group, members of the Early Learning Council, and others. It will recommend the process for redesigning the Benchmarks, including the input and review phases; develop a proposal to engage consultants to support the effort; and make recommendations for implementing the redesigned Benchmarks.



This will be an inclusive process, one that draws upon the research, knowledge, and expertise of a broad array of stakeholders. During the redesign process, we will continue to distribute copies of the 2005 Benchmarks upon request. We welcome feedback on the 2005 Benchmarks and will actively solicit additional comments and input as this work-in-progress unfolds.

Thank you for your interest in early learning development and in giving children in Washington outstanding opportunities to develop into their full potential. Together, we can make our state a leader in this area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Christine O. Gregoire".

Christine O. Gregoire
Governor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Terry Bergeson".

Terry Bergeson, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction